

Skateboarding

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Skatepark advocates renew debate over park

**Cost, location
remain reasons
behind closure**

By Debra Filcman
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DUXBURY – Imagine paying for a new home, at least partly. Then imagine that it is appropriated and demolished by the local municipality. Some local skateboarders are

feeling angry, confused and homeless, with their skatepark long gone and plans to rebuild still uncertain.

Nearly a decade ago, skateboarders lobbied the town to build its first skatepark. They helped raise funds and paid dues to use it. A few years later, the skatepark was disassembled to make way for the new performing arts center, and now they wonder if their ramps will ever again see the light of day.

So far, five years after the debate

began, they haven't. The ramps, valued at nearly \$2,500, are locked behind the high school, and few remain intact, users said. Those that are have been rendered useless.

The park, which had been located on school property and run by the recreation department, remains a point of contention for many.

"A lot of people don't realize that (skateboarding) is not a sport, it's an art," Bill Leonard, who was in-

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strumental in getting the park built in the mid-1990s, said.

Leonard once led the debate between his peers and town officials in establishing the skatepark behind the then-closed Alden School, and has now passed the torch to Duxbury High School student and avid skateboarder, Chris McLeod.

"Whatever you do, don't give up," Leonard said in a letter to his successor. "If you're sincere in your quest to rebuild the park, over time it will show. That's what the school committee, the superintendent and recreation department look for.

"Over the last few years, a lot of people have come forward to rebuild the park. Not one of them has stuck to it, and the park remains dead."

When talks began about building the park the first time around, Leonard said, the process was initiated by about 20 families whose children needed a place to ride their boards. Meetings were scheduled weekly, and soon that number was whittled down to only four or five families devoted to the cause.

The intimate group, however, raised money to build the ramps through car washes and other fundraising events, and engendered

interest on the part of local business owners and administrators. Leo Vercallone, owner of the Exxon station, for example, donated 8 cents toward the construction for every gallon of gas sold and architect John Nolan designed the plans.

But funding and location ultimately played a prominent role in the park's demise. The park, built on the grounds of a closed school, created problems when the school reopened. A fence was built to keep schoolchildren safe voluntary rules and regulations about opening and closing times and safety gear were not being observed.

In addition to changes in the school's status, other changes were imminent. The town's insurance carrier changed, and while the park remained covered, stringent rules were attached to Metrogard's policy.

The park needed to be supervised by an employee of the recreation department during all open hours; that employee was to submit a daily written report for any area in disrepair; the area must have been under lock and key; users had to sign waivers; and rules and regulations must be prominently displayed, according to the insurance policy.

While former skaters like Leonard said they were hired by the recreation department to monitor the park, recreation director Gordon Cushing said that was not an option this time around.

Such precautions cost the town approximately \$10,000 each year, Cushing said, adding that that was in 1999-2000 dollars, and it's probably more now.

"These are tough financial times, and it's difficult for me to support any program that is a drain on the budget and will lose money right away," Cushing said. "The skatepark was losing money in its last few years. I think it lost \$5,000 in the last year it was open."

Cushing also said that although students like Leonard and McLeod often say they raised most of the money for the park, in reality they only raised approximately \$2,500.

"That was awesome, and then someone else matched the \$2,500, but the department of public works and recreation department each pitched in money from their budgets to make it happen," Cushing said.

He said a total of \$45,000 was originally needed to build the park.

Leonard and McLeod say they have been given the runaround by numerous town employees, among them the recreation and school employees and the town manager. Each is pointing fingers back to the other, claiming the other is responsible for the facility.

Leonard said that before the performing arts center was built, school business manager Mickey McGonagle told students at a special town meeting in 2000 that anything lost, stolen or damaged by the construction process would be replaced.

Claiming that many of the ramps have been stolen and damaged, the skaters turned to McGonagle asking for a return of these items, should the skatepark be rebuilt near the Chandler school, as proposed.

McGonagle claims that the wooden and concrete structures were not stolen or damaged, but some needed to be demolished during construction because they were not mobile.

"It's not a school program so it's not up to me whether or not they get their skatepark back - I just stored their ramps," McGonagle said. "But if the town decides that they want to rebuild the park, then I'm certainly happy to make good on the promise and sit down with them and decide what comes next. "Sometimes it's hard to get across to kids that these are separate departments. They often just see the town as a whole as one department and don't realize that it's not in my hands."

The decision is ultimately up to the recreation commission, made up of seven individuals chosen by the board of selectmen. They will meet with McLeod, who has provided them with a detailed proposal of what was needed, and other advocates April 11 to discuss his proposal and will likely vote on the issue.



Chris McLeod is looking to rebuild the Duxbury skatepark.



Flying — A local skateboarder practices at Marshfield Skate Park.